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FM AMEMBASSY BISHKEK
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INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING IMMEDIATE 2027
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO IMMEDIATE 0117
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA IMMEDIATE 0127
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 0600
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0416
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU IMMEDIATE 0124
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 0283
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 0519
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE IMMEDIATE 2422
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 1807
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BISHKEK 000343

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DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: BAKIYEV FIRES USENOV, TAKES OTHER STEPS TOWARD
COMPROMISE WITH KYRGYZ OPPOSITION

REF: A. BISHKEK 334
[1](#)B. BISHKEK 332
[1](#)C. BISHKEK 316
[1](#)D. BISHKEK 284
[1](#)E. BISHKEK 270
[1](#)F. BISHEK 228

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Classified By: Amb. Marie L. Yovanovitch, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a dramatic move March 28, President Bakiyev fired powerful and controversial First Deputy Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov, four other cabinet members, and two agency heads. The firings follow a series of moves by Bakiyev to reach out to the broader opposition, as Felix Kulov's United Front moves ahead with preparations for open-ended street protests starting April 11 to demand early presidential elections. In recent days, President Bakiyev has met with selected members of the opposition, including Almaz Atambayev, and he has proposed negotiations with the opposition. He fired his controversial prosecutor general, offered to form a working group to propose constitutional changes, and rescinded his veto of the public television law, clearing the way for the transformation of the state television company into a public entity. The opposition For Reforms movement appears to have split over the question whether to support Kulov, with a number of members forming a new "United Kyrgyzstan" bloc, calling only for constitutional reform, not the president's resignation. Both government and opposition are concerned about the possibility of violence during the April demonstrations, and behind-the-scenes discussions continue. At this point, it is too soon to tell whether firing Usenov and the other measures will appease Kulov or the broader opposition. End Summary.

United Front Gearing Up

12. (C) Felix Kulov's United Front for a Decent Future for Kyrgyzstan is moving ahead with plans for nationwide demonstrations in April. The United Front's executive director Omurbek Suvanliyev told the Ambassador that they would continue the protests until Bakiyev vacates the White House, and the Front could count on the power ministries (MVD, GKNB) to help. The protests would begin on April 5 with a ceremonial hunger strike of approximately 50 opposition leaders in Bishkek. Protests in the regions would begin on April 9, followed by an open-ended mass demonstration in Bishkek central Ala-Too Square on April 11. The United Front is demanding that President Bakiyev call early presidential elections (his term runs until 2010) and carry out previously pledged reforms. United Front appears to be well-funded, and it claims to have opened 51 offices around the country (although a recent television report showed that at least some of the addresses given were actually private apartments with residents who were unaware of any connection to United Front). Kulov has upped the rhetoric, saying that the April rally aimed for a "peaceful handover of power," and dismissing Bakiyev's offers of negotiations and further constitutional reform as "empty words."

For Reforms Splitting Up

13. (C) United Front has grown in size and strength, gaining support from a number of parliamentarians, ex-government officials, and members of the other large opposition movement, For Reforms. In fact, the debate over whether to

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support the protest action appears to have split For Reforms. After For Reforms released a statement that its members were ready to participate in peaceful protests, on March 28 a number of For Reforms members, including MP Azimbek Beknazarov, former FM Roza Otunbayeva, Almaz Atambayev, MP Dooronbek Sadyrbayev, and Edil Baisalov, quit the movement in order to form "United Kyrgyzstan." According to Sadyrbayev, they want to create a "clean" organization, working for constitutional reform, economic stability, and human rights -- within the legal framework and without violence.

Bakiyev Reaching Out

14. (C) Bakiyev has said repeatedly that he would not respond to threats and ultimatums, but he has taken a number of steps to compromise and negotiate -- or at least appear to be doing so. Over the past two weeks, Bakiyev has been reaching out to the opposition, meeting with selected leaders, including MP Temir Sariyev, MP Omurbek Babanov, and (now former) For Reforms co-chair Almaz Atambayev. Bakiyev traveled to the March 17 commemoration of the Aksy events -- a major concession to Beknazarov. Bakiyev has also taken steps to meet some of the opposition's demands, including dismissing Procurator General Kongantiyev on March 19. In his address to the nation on March 23, Bakiyev said he was ready to take "any steps" in the interests of the people. Admitting mistakes in the adoption of new constitutions in November and December, he offered to establish a new working group to draft changes to the constitution, which would be adopted only with the approval of parliament and the constitutional court. (Note: the November and December changes to the constitution were adopted without following the constitutional procedures. End Note.) He also challenged the opposition to work with him in his speech marking the two-year anniversary of the "tulip revolution" (Ref A). And on March 26, Bakiyev withdrew his veto (from last September) and signed the law to transform the state television company into public television.

Usenov Fired

15. (C) In a dramatic move March 28, President Bakiyev fired controversial First Deputy Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov and four other cabinet members, including Minister of Emergency Situations Rustembekov, Minister of Economy and Trade Moldokulov, Minister of Health Niazov, and head of the Prime Minister's administration Tabyldiyev. Prime Minister Isabekov told the press that he had made the decision to reshuffle the government, and that he welcomed suggestions from political parties and civil society for replacements. He said the government was ready to reach out to the opposition.

Atambayev Playing Moderator

16. (C) Almaz Atambayev, former Minister of Trade, (now former) For Reforms co-chair, and one of the organizers of last November's protests, appears to be playing the role of moderator. He told the Ambassador March 27 that he was trying to bring the two sides together, but he was stuck between Bakiyev, who can't make a decision, and Kulov, who can't compromise. The core problem between them was that Bakiyev won't agree to Kulov's only demand -- early elections.

17. (C) Atambayev said that the November protests had come

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close to conflict, but this time the opposition was more radical, "high" with power, and ready to drive toward confrontation. Atambayev said it was impossible to predict how the power ministries would react to the situation; it was possible they would side with Kulov. Kulov is charismatic and can attract people to his side, but with the exception of MP Omurbek Tekebayev, all of Kulov's support is from the north. Thus, any confrontation could spark a north-south civil war.

18. (C) Atambayev has had a series of meetings with Bakiyev. He said the president had offered him several positions, including PM. Atambayev said he was only interested if the president issued an edict on constitutional reform (done), signed the public television bill (done), and fired the corrupt people in the administration, bringing in 40-45% new people, including from the opposition. Replacing personnel would be difficult, but Atambayev claimed the president is considering it (and, as today's firings confirm, has acted on it but has so far left the PM in place). Atambayev said it would be a "kamikaze" mission to go into the government alone.

19. (C) Atambayev said the only solution to the current standoff is to talk. While he doesn't trust the president, Atambayev said that there was no alternative, and that it would be a disaster for the country if Bakiyev were driven from office. He told the Ambassador that within the next few days a group of like-minded politicians would form a new group "to save the country." (On March 28, Atambayev and other members of For Reforms announced the formation of United Kyrgyzstan.)

Comment

110. (C) Both the government (Ref B) and members of the opposition (Ref E) have told us that they are very concerned about the likelihood of violence during the April protests. There are rumors of weapons being stockpiled on both sides and other preparations being made for possible conflict. Kulov has said repeatedly that the United Front's actions will be peaceful and lawful, but there is no sign that he will back down from his central demand of early presidential elections. His strategy is to appear uncompromising and as

strong as possible -- whether through the whispers of Russian support or the allegations of power ministry support.

¶11. (C) Kulov's strategy is clearly working, although the effect has been to galvanize the usually indecisive president into making major concessions -- concessions that Bakiyev hopes will divide the opposition and cause supporters to abandon Kulov and his maximalist stand. But there is little trust between opposition and Bakiyev, and while Bakiyev may be forced to compromise now, the doubters will ask how long any deal will last.

¶12. (C) Some in the opposition, while not trusting Bakiyev, appear to be working to avoid a direct confrontation. The government shake-up may be a first step towards the kind of coalition government that Atambayev has been urging. Today's developments are dramatic and could mollify some, but it is not clear they will appease Kulov, although some had previewed Usenov's departure as the necessary pre-condition between Bakiyev and Kulov (see Ref C).

¶13. (C) The next move is clearly Kulov's. The political situation remains unpredictable, as alliances shift and

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behind-the-scenes discussions continue. At this point, no one is willing to wager on the outcome, with Bakiyev and Kulov still the main figures jockeying for power.
YOVANOVITCH